

Who Makes the Sixth Generation Chinese cinema?

Outline

Starting Question: Considering the wide acknowledgment that Chinese film industry is under the state's strict control, can we say that the Sixth Generation directors, refusing to go through censorship, have achieved autonomy in their artistic field?

My argument: Although I agree that to some degree, they have achieved greater space for artistic production than any other directors before, the Sixth Generation Chinese cinema is far from autonomy. It is not a coincidence or simply a result of the sixth generation directors' struggle for a new aesthetics, instead, it is defined and constructed by the internal rule of game, and external conditions—particularly, international festival and a rising taste culture in China.

Structure: I will address the following questions: How does the sixth generation directors consciously differentiate themselves from the fifth generation? How are the style and production affected by international expectations? How does the new taste culture help their works to achieve prestigious status of art cinema in China?

Theory: Bourdieu's theory of field and taste

Method: This is a contextual study of cinema: production, exhibition, niche-consumption, and other discourses that define the 6th Generation Chinese cinema. I will do archive search of newspapers and magazines on the fifth and sixth generation; website research and interview on film clubs in China.

The rule of game in the field of art

This part is on the sixth generation directors' effort to claim their fame by establishing different style from the fifth generation.

- The reputation and popularity of the fifth generation's film in China

- The consciousness of distinction (How do the younger directors differentiate themselves from the fifth generation directors)
- Style of the Sixth Generation Cinema: ‘neo-neorealism’-- focus on the more marginalized, the extreme, the abnormal. For example, the characters in their films are thief, homosexual, jobless young people, traveling amateur performers, etc. Cinematography is not considered as important as the subject (thus, you cannot see much elaboration of light and editing, etc.). It is not about story, so you cannot find suspense. They reveal what is invisible to our ‘civilized’ eyes.
- Objective factors which affect the choice of style: insufficient investment in production (difficulty in getting financial support); non-professional equipment (most of their works are shot on DV, and by a very small group of non-professional people). These factors, to a great degree, decide the impossibility of making films like the fifth generation directors.

International Festival

My hypothesis: There is some preference or taste for Chinese film in international festivals, which encourages Chinese filmmakers to take the ‘neo-neorealism’ direction. International festival provides chances for the sixth generation directors to achieve international reputation and economic profit (the latter is not as important as the former) [books and articles on international festival and exhibition?]

Reception in China—Cinema as A Taste

The recognition of the sixth generation is inseparable from the new rising taste culture, particularly after mid-1990s.

- China in pursuit of lifestyle (consumption culture, taste, distinction)
- Emergence of film bars, clubs, and societies: 101 film club in Shanghai, U-theque in Guangzhou, In Motion Society in Beijing, to name a few.
- Case study of U-theque (membership, exhibition environment, social activity, audience-director talk, publicity)